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# CIA Disinformation in Action: Operation Mockingbird and the Washington Post

Mockingbird examples with introduction by H. Michael [Sweeney](#), [proparanoid.com](#)

Document by Julian Holmes

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The very lengthy (25 pages typewritten) document below is actually a letter to the Washington Post by Julian C. Holmes, in which he takes the Post to task for decades of disinformation - typically in the form of combating what the Post likes to describe as 'conspiracy theory' which, in the end, turns out to be conspiracy fact. This uncopyrighted document was borrowed with permission from Michael Rivero's excellent <http://www.whatreallyhappened.com> Web site. In an unusual format, Holmes carefully documents each accusation with footnotes, a valuable tool for the reader. This is no mere rant, no mere opinionated dissatisfaction, no angry response dashed off without thinking. **No, it is an indictment.** Nestled within the over 100 footnotes and the not quite as many individual examples of suppression and distortions of truth, and even fabrications of 'truth', is a root-most clue to the real problem - a problem which reader should take care not to miss grasping...

That is the covert role played by the Washington Post in CIA's Operation Mockingbird, which is the infiltration and control of American media to insure that you and I never quite hear the truth as it really is. You will learn how the owner/publisher of the Post, Phillip Graham and graduate of the Army Intelligence School was literally the founding director of Operation Mockingbird on behalf of CIA. The significance is amplified when it is understood that Mockingbird was not simply the sell out of a newspaper. It was the organized infiltration and in some cases the actual take over of the top 25 newspapers in the United States, major television networks, high-profile magazines, the wire services (Reuters was an outright CIA owned and operated front until 'sold' to 'private' interests) and even motion picture studios. Since then, of course, it has expanded further. For more information, visit Rivero's site and read the excellent piece found there by author Alex Constantine, *Tales From They Crypt*.

We might expect a fascist dictatorship to use the motto-policy of "Do what we tell you or else!" We would prefer to believe that our own democratic and free nation's motto-policy would be "Do what you think best." However, thanks to a secret government and CIA, it is actually "Do what we tell you to think best." That may have been what Eisenhower was warning us about when he coined the phrase "military industrial complex" in his farewell address. In my own writing I have followed his lead and updated the phrase to that of simply: MIIM, the Military Industrial Intelligence Media complex. Subscribe to the Washington Post, dear sheep, and welcome to the New World Order. Or, listen to Holmes and decide for yourself. It is still your choice to make, despite what they would have you believe...

April 25, 1992

Richard Harwood, Ombudsman

The Washington Post

1150 15th Street NW

Washington, DC 20071

Dear Mr. Harwood,

Though the Washington Post does not over-extend itself in the pursuit of hard news, just let drop the faintest rumor of a government "conspiracy", and a klaxon horn goes off in the news room. Aroused from

apathy in the daily routine of reporting assignments and various other political and social sports events, editors and reporters scramble to the phones. The klaxon screams its warning: the greatest single threat to herd-journalism, corporate profits, and government stability the dreaded "CONSPIRACY THEORY"!!

It is not known whether anyone has actually been hassled or accosted by any of these frightful spectres, but their presence is announced to Post readers with a salvo of warnings to avoid the tricky, sticky webs spun by the wacko "CONSPIRACY THEORISTS".

Recall how the Post saved us from the truth about Iran-Contra.

Professional conspiracy exorcist Mark Hosenball was hired to ridicule the idea that Oliver North and his CIA-associated gangsters had conspired to do wrong (\*1). And when, in their syndicated column, Jack Anderson and Dale Van Atta discussed some of the conspirators, the Post sprang to protect its readers, and the conspirators, by censoring the Anderson column before printing it (\*2).

But for some time the lid had been coming off the Iran-Contra conspiracy. In 1986, the Christic Institute, an interfaith center for law and public policy, had filed a lawsuit alleging a U.S. arms-for-drugs trade that helped keep weapons flowing to the CIA-Contra army in Nicaragua, and cocaine flowing to U.S. markets (\*3). In 1988 Leslie Cockburn published *Out of Control*, a seminal work on our bizarre, illegal war against Nicaragua (\*4). The Post contributed to this discovery process by disparaging the charges of conspiracy and by publishing false information about the drug-smuggling evidence presented to the House Subcommittee on Narcotics Abuse and Control. When accused by Committee Chairman Charles Rangel (D-NY). of misleading reporting, the Post printed only a partial correction and declined to print a letter of complaint from Rangel (\*5).

Sworn testimony before Senator John Kerry's Subcommittee on Terrorism, Narcotics, and International Operations confirmed U.S. Government complicity in the drug trade (\*6). With its coverup of the arms/drug conspiracy evaporating, the ever-accommodating Post shifted gears and retained Hosenball to exorcise from our minds a newly emerging threat to domestic tranquility, the "October Surprise" conspiracy (\*7). But close on the heels of Hosenball and the Post came Barbara Honegger and then Gary Sick who authored independently, two years apart, books with the same title, "October Surprise" (\*8). Honegger was a member of the Reagan/Bush campaign and transition teams in 1980. Gary Sick, professor of Middle East Politics at Columbia University, was on the staff of the National Security Council under Presidents Ford, Carter, and Reagan. In 1989 and 1991 respectively, Honegger and Sick published their evidence of how the Republicans made a deal to supply arms to Iran if Iran would delay release of the 52 United States hostages until after the November 1980 election. The purpose of this deal was to quash the possibility of a pre-election release(an October surprise). which would have bolstered the reelection prospects for President Carter.

Others published details of this alleged Reagan-Bush conspiracy. In October 1988, *Playboy Magazine* ran an expose "An Election Held Hostage"; *FRONTLINE* did another in April 1991 (\*9). In June, 1991 a conference of distinguished journalists, joined by 8 of the former hostages, challenged the Congress to "make a full, impartial investigation" of the election/hostage allegations. The Post reported the statement of the hostages, but not a word of the conference itself which was held in the Dirksen Senate Office Building Auditorium (\*10). On February 5, 1992 a gun-shy, uninspired House of Representatives begrudgingly authorized an "October Surprise" investigation by a task force of 13 congressmen headed by Lee Hamilton (D-IN). who had chaired the House of Representatives Iran-Contra Committee. Hamilton has named as chief team counsel Larry Barcella, a lawyer who represented BCCI when the Bank was indicted in 1988 (\*11).

Like the Washington Post, Hamilton had not shown interest in pursuing the U.S. arms-for-drugs operation

(\*12). He had accepted Oliver North's lies, and as Chairman of the House Intelligence Committee he derailed House Resolution 485 which had asked President Reagan to answer questions about Contra support activities of government officials and others (\*13). After CIA operative John

Hull (from Hamilton's home state). was charged in Costa Rica with "international drug trafficking and hostile acts against the nation's security", Hamilton and 18 fellow members of Congress tried to intimidate Costa Rican President Oscar Arias Sanchez into handling Hull's case "in a manner that will not complicate U.S.-Costa Rican relations" (\*14). The Post did not report the Hamilton letter or the Costa Rican response that declared Hull's case to be "in as good hands as our 100 year old uninterrupted democracy can provide to all citizens" (\*15).

Though the Post does its best to guide our thinking away from conspiracy theories, it is difficult to avoid the fact that so much wrongdoing involves government or corporate conspiracies:

In its COINTELPRO operation, the FBI used disinformation, forgery, surveillance, false arrests, and violence to illegally harass U.S. citizens in the 60's (\*16).

The CIA's Operation MONGOOSE illegally sabotaged Cuba by "destroying crops, brutalizing citizens, destabilizing the society, and conspiring with the Mafia to assassinate Fidel Castro and other leaders" (\*17).

"Standard Oil of New Jersey was found by the Antitrust Division of the Department of Justice to be conspiring with I.G. Farben... of Germany. ...By its cartel agreements with Standard Oil, the United States was effectively prevented from developing or producing [for World War-II] any substantial amount of synthetic rubber," said Senator Robert LaFollette of Wisconsin (\*18).

U.S. Government agencies knowingly withheld information about dosages of radiation "almost certain to produce thyroid abnormalities or cancer" that contaminated people residing near the nuclear weapons factory at Hanford, Washington (\*19).

Various branches of Government deliberately drag their feet in getting around to cleaning up the Nation's dangerous nuclear weapons sites (\*20). State and local governments back the nuclear industry's secret public relations strategy (\*21).

"The National Cancer Institute, the American Cancer Society and some twenty comprehensive cancer centers, have misled and confused the public and Congress by repeated claims that we are winning the war against cancer. In fact, the cancer establishment has continually minimized the evidence for increasing cancer rates which it has largely attributed to smoking and dietary fat, while discounting or ignoring the causal role of avoidable exposures to industrial carcinogens in the air, food, water, and the workplace." (\*22).

The Bush Administration coverup of its pre-Gulf-War support of Iraq "is yet another example of the President's people conspiring to keep both Congress and the American people in the dark" (\*23).

If you think about it, conspiracy is a fundamental aspect of doing business in this country.

Take the systematic and cooperative censorship of the Persian Gulf War by the Pentagon and much of the news media (\*24).

Or the widespread plans of business and government groups to spend \$100 million in taxes to promote a distorted and truncated history of Columbus in America (\*25). along the lines of the Smithsonian Institution's "fusion of the two worlds", (\*26). rather than examining more realistic aspects of the Spanish

invasion, like "anger, cruelty, gold, terror, and death" (\*27).

Or circumstances surrounding the U.S. Justice Department theft from the INSLAW company of sophisticated, law-enforcement computer software which "now point to a widespread conspiracy implicating lesser Government officials in the theft of INSLAW's technology", says former U.S. Attorney General Elliot Richardson (\*28).

Or Watergate.

Or the "largest bank fraud in world financial history" (\*29), where the White House knew of the criminal activities at "the Bank of Crooks and Criminals International" (BCCI) (\*30), where U.S. intelligence agencies did their secret banking (\*31), and where bribery of prominent American public officials "was a way of doing business" (\*32).

Or the 1949 conviction of "GM [General Motors], Standard Oil of California, Firestone, and E. Roy Fitzgerald, among others, for criminally conspiring to replace electric transportation with gas- and diesel-powered buses and to monopolize the sale of buses and related products to transportation companies throughout the country" [in, among others, the cities of New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, St. Louis, Oakland, Salt Lake City, and Los Angeles] (\*33).

Or the collusion in 1973 between Senator Abraham Ribicoff (D-CT). and the U.S. Department of Transportation to overlook safety defects in the 1.2 million Corvair automobiles manufactured by General Motors in the early 60's (\*34).

Or the A. H. Robins Company, which manufactured the Dalkon Shield intrauterine contraceptive, and which ignored repeated warnings of the Shield's hazards and which "stonewalled, deceived, covered up, and

covered up the coverups...[thus inflicting] on women a worldwide epidemic of pelvic infections." (\*35).

Or that cooperation between McDonnell Douglas Aircraft Company and the FAA resulted in failure to enforce regulations regarding the unsafe DC-10 cargo door which failed in flight killing all 364 passengers on Turkish Airlines Flight 981 on March 3, 1974 (\*36).

Or the now-banned, cancer-producing pregnancy drug Diethylstilbestrol (DES). that was sold by manufacturers who ignored tests which showed DES to be carcinogenic; and who acted "in concert with each other in the testing and marketing of DES for miscarriage purposes" (\*37).

Or the conspiracies among bankers and speculators, with the cooperation of a corrupted Congress, to relieve depositors of their savings. This "arrogant disregard from the White House, Congress and corporate world for the interests and rights of the American people" will cost U.S. taxpayers many hundreds of billions of dollars (\*38).

Or the Westinghouse, Allis Chalmers, Federal Pacific, and General Electric executives who met surreptitiously in hotel rooms to fix prices and eliminate competition on heavy industrial equipment (\*39).

Or the convictions of Industrial Biotech Laboratories (IBT). officers for fabricating safety tests on prescription drugs (\*40).

Or the conspiracy by the asbestos industry to suppress knowledge of medical problems relating to asbestos (\*41).

Or the 1928 Achnacarry Agreement through which oil companies "agreed not to engage in any effective price competition" (\*42).

Or the conspiracy among U.S. Government agencies and the Congress to cover up the nature of our decades-old war against the people of Nicaragua

a covert war that continues in 1992 with the U.S. Government applying pressure for the Nicaraguan police to reorganize into a more repressive force (\*43).

Or the conspiracy by the CIA and the U.S. Government to interfere in the Chilean election process with military aid, covert actions, and an economic boycott which culminated in the overthrow of the legitimately elected government and the assassination of President Salvador Allende in 1973 (\*44).

Or the conspiracy among U.S. officials including Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and CIA Director William Colby to finance terrorism in Angola for the purpose of disrupting Angola's plans for peaceful elections in October 1975, and to lie about these actions to the Congress and the news media (\*45). And CIA Director George Bush's subsequent cover up of this U.S.-sponsored terrorism (\*46).

Or President George Bush's consorting with the Pentagon to invade Panama in 1989 and thereby violate the Constitution of the United States, the U.N. Charter, the O.A.S. Charter, and the Panama Canal Treaties (\*47).

Or the "gross antitrust violations" (\*48) and the conspiracy of American oil companies and the British and U.S. governments to strangle Iran economically after Iran nationalized the British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in 1951. And the subsequent overthrow by the CIA in 1953 of Iranian Prime Minister Muhammed Mossadegh (\*49).

Or the CIA-planned assassination of Congo head-of-state Patrice Lumumba (\*50).

Or the deliberate and wilful efforts of President George Bush, Senator Robert Dole, Senator George Mitchell, various U.S. Government agencies, and members of both Houses of the Congress to buy the 1990 Nicaraguan national elections for the presidential candidate supported by President Bush (\*51).

Or the collective approval by 64 U.S. Senators of Robert Gates to head the CIA, in the face of "unmistakable evidence that Gates lied about his role in the Iran-Contra scandal" (\*52).

Or "How Reagan and the Pope Conspired to Assist Poland's Solidarity Movement and Hasten the Demise of Communism" (\*53).

Or how the Reagan Administration connived with the Vatican to ban the use of USAID funds by any country "for the promotion of birth control or abortion" (\*54).

Or "the way the Vatican and Washington colluded to achieve common purpose in Central America" (\*55).

Or the collaboration of Guatemalan strong-man and mass murderer Hector Gramajo with the U.S. Army to design "programs to build civilian-military cooperation" at the U.S. Army School of the Americas (SOA) at Fort Benning, Georgia; five of the nine soldiers accused in the 1989 Jesuit massacre in El Salvador are graduates of SOA which trains Latin/American military personnel (\*56).

Or the conspiracy of the Comanche Peak Nuclear Plant administration to harass and cause bodily harm to whistleblower Linda Porter who uncovered dangerous working conditions at the facility (\*57).

Or the conspiracy of President Richard Nixon and the Government of South Vietnam to delay the Paris Peace Talks until after the 1968 U.S. presidential election (\*58).

Or the pandemic coverups of police violence (\*59).

Or the always safe-to-cite worldwide communist conspiracy (\*60).

Or maybe the socially responsible, secret consortium to publish The Satanic Verses in paperback (\*61).

Conspiracies are obviously a way to get things done, and the Washington Post offers little comment unless conspiracy theorizing threatens to expose a really important conspiracy that, let's say, benefits big business or big government.

Such a conspiracy would be like our benevolent CIA's 1953 overthrow of the Iranian government to help out U.S. oil companies; or like our illegal war against Panama to tighten U.S. control over Panama and the Canal; or like monopoly control of broadcasting that facilitates corporate censorship on issues of public importance (\*62). When the camouflage of such conspiracies is stripped away, public confidence in the conspiring officials can erode depending on how seriously the citizenry perceives the conspiracy to have violated the public trust. Erosion of public trust in the status quo is what the Post seems to see as a real threat to its corporate security.

Currently, the Post has mounted vituperative, frenzied attacks on Oliver Stone's movie "JFK", which reexamines the U.S. Government's official (Warren Commission. finding that a single gunman, acting alone, killed President John F. Kennedy. The movie also is the story of New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison's unsuccessful prosecution of Clay Shaw, the only person ever tried in connection with the assassination. And the movie proposes that the Kennedy assassination was the work of conspirators whose interests would not be served by a president who, had he lived, might have disengaged us from our war against Vietnam.

The Post ridicules a reexamination of the Kennedy assassination along lines suggested by "JFK". Senior Post journalists like Charles Krauthammer, Ken Ringle, George Will, Phil McCombs, and Michael Isikoff, have been called up to man the bulwarks against public sentiment which has never supported the government's non-conspiratorial assassination thesis. In spite of the facts that the Senate Intelligence Committee of 1975 and 1976 found that "both the FBI and CIA had repeatedly lied to the Warren Commission" (\*63) and that the 1979 Report of the House Select Committee on Assassinations found that President Kennedy was probably killed "as a result of a conspiracy" (\*64), a truly astounding number of Post stories have been used as vehicles to discredit "JFK" as just another conspiracy (\*65).

Some of the more vicious attacks on the movie are by editor Stephen Rosenfeld, and journalists Richard Cohen, George Will, and George Lardner Jr (\*66). They ridicule the idea that Kennedy could have had second thoughts about escalating the Vietnam War and declaim that there is no historical justification for this idea. Seasoned journalist Peter Dale Scott, former Pentagon/CIA liaison chief L. Fletcher Prouty, and investigators David Scheim and John Newman have each authored defense of the "JFK" thesis that Kennedy was not enthusiastic about staying in Vietnam (\*67). But the Post team just continues ranting against the possibility of a high-level assassination conspiracy while offering little justification for its arguments.

An example of particularly shabby scholarship and unacceptable behavior is George Lardner Jr's contribution to the Post's campaign against the movie. Lardner wrote three articles, two before the movie was completed, and the third upon its release. In May, six months before the movie came out, Lardner obtained a copy of the first draft of the script and, contrary to accepted standards, revealed in the Post the contents of this copyrighted movie (\*68). Also in this article, (\*69). Lardner discredits Jim Garrison with

hostile statements from a former Garrison associate Pershing Gervais. Lardner does not tell the reader that subsequent to the Clay Shaw trial, in a U.S. Government criminal action brought against Garrison, Government witness Gervais, who helped set up Garrison for prosecution, admitted under oath that in a May 1972 interview with a New Orleans television reporter, he, Gervais, had said that the U.S. Government's case against Garrison was a fraud (\*70). The Post's 1973 account of the Garrison acquittal mentions this controversy, but when I recently asked Lardner about this, he was not clear as to whether he remembered it (\*71).

Two weeks after his first "JFK" article, Lardner blustered his way through a justification for his unauthorized possession of the early draft of the movie (\*72). He also defended his reference to Pershing Gervais by lashing out at Garrison as a writer "of gothic fiction".

When the movie was released in December, Lardner "reviewed" it (\*73). He again ridiculed the film's thesis that following the Kennedy assassination, President Johnson reversed Kennedy's plans to de-escalate the Vietnam War. Lardner cited a memorandum issued by Johnson four days after Kennedy died. Lardner says this memorandum was written before the assassination, and that it "was a continuation of Kennedy's policy". In fact, the memorandum was drafted the day before the assassination by McGeorge Bundy (Kennedy's Assistant for National Security Affairs) Kennedy was in Texas, and may never have seen it. Following the assassination, it was rewritten; and the final version provided for escalating the war against Vietnam (\*74) facts that Lardner avoided.

The Post's crusade against exposing conspiracies is blatantly dishonest:

The Warren Commission inquiry into the Kennedy Assassination was for the most part conducted in secret. This fact is buried in the Post (\*75). Nor do current readers of this newspaper find meaningful discussion of the Warren Commission's secret doubts about both the FBI and the CIA (\*76). Or of a dispatch from CIA headquarters instructing co-conspirators at field stations to counteract the "new wave of books and articles criticizing the [Warren] Commission's findings...[and] conspiracy theories ...[that] have frequently thrown suspicion on our organization" and to "discuss the publicity problem with liaison and friendly elite contacts, especially politicians and editors "and to "employ propaganda assets to answer and refute the attacks of the critics. ...Book reviews and feature articles are particularly appropriate for this purpose. ...The aim of this dispatch is to provide material for countering and discrediting the claims of the conspiracy theorists..." (\*77).

In 1979, Washington journalist Deborah Davis published *Katharine The Great*, the story of Post publisher Katharine Graham and her newspaper's close ties with Washington's powerful elite, a number of whom were with the CIA.

Particularly irksome to Post editor Benjamin Bradlee was a Davis claim that Bradlee had "produced CIA material" (\*78). Understandably sensitive about this kind of publicity, Bradlee told Davis' publisher Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, "Miss Davis is lying ...I never produced CIA material ...what I can do is to brand Miss Davis as a fool and to put your company in that special little group of publishers who don't give a shit for the truth". The Post bullied HBJ into recalling the book; HBJ shredded 20,000 copies; Davis sued HBJ for breach of contract and damage to reputation; HBJ settled out of court; and Davis published her book elsewhere with an appendix that demonstrated Bradlee to have been deeply involved with producing cold-war/CIA propaganda (\*79). Bradlee still says the allegations about his association with people in the CIA are false, but he has apparently taken no action to contest the extensive documentation presented by Deborah Davis in the second and third editions of her book (\*80).

And it's not as if the Post were new to conspiracy work.

\* Former Washington Post publisher Philip Graham "believing that the function of the press was more

often than not to mobilize consent for the policies of the government, was one of the architects of what became a widespread practice: the use and manipulation of journalists by the CIA" (\*81). This scandal was known by its code name Operation MOCKINGBIRD. Former Washington Post reporter Carl Bernstein cites a former CIA deputy director as saying, "It was widely known that Phil Graham was someone you could get help from" (\*82). More recently the Post provided cover for CIA personality Joseph Fernandez by "refusing to print his name for over a year up until the day his indictment was announced ...for crimes committed in his official capacity as CIA station chief in Costa Rica" (\*83).

Of the meetings between Graham and his CIA acquaintances at which the availability and prices of journalists were discussed, a former CIA man recalls, "You could get a journalist cheaper than a good call girl, for a couple hundred dollars a month" (\*84). One may wish to consider Philip Graham's philosophy along with a more recent statement from his wife Katharine Graham, current Chairman of the Board of the Washington Post. In a lecture on terrorism and the news media, Mrs. Graham said: "A second challenge facing the media is how to prevent terrorists from using the media as a platform for their views. ... The point is that we generally know when we are being manipulated, and we've learned better how and where to draw the line, though the decisions are often difficult" (\*85).

Today, the Post and its world of big business are apparently terrified that our elite and our high-level public officials may be exposed as conspirators behind Contra drug-smuggling, October Surprise, or the assassination of President Kennedy. This fear is truly remarkable in that, like most of us and like most institutions, the Post runs its business as a conspiracy of like-minded entrepreneurs a conspiracy "to act or work together toward the same result or goal" (\*86). But where the Post really parts company from just plain people is when it pretends that conspiracies associated with big business or government are "coincidence". Post reporter Lardner vents the frustration inherent in having to maintain this dichotomy. He lashes out at Oliver Stone and suggests that Stone may actually believe that the Post's opposition to Stone's movie is a "conspiracy". Lardner assures us that Stone's complaints are "groundless and paranoid and smack of McCarthyism" (\*87).

So how does the Post justify devoting so much energy to ridiculing those who investigate conspiracies?

The Post has answers: people revert to conspiracy theories because they need something "neat and tidy" (\*88) that "plugs a gap no other generally accepted theory fills", (\*89. and "coincidence ...is always the safest and most likely explanation for any conjunction of curious circumstances ..." (\*90).

And what does this response mean? It means that "coincidence theory" is what the Post espouses when it would prefer not to admit to a conspiracy. In other words, some things just "happen". And, besides, conspiracy to do certain things would be a crime; "coincidence" is a safer bet.

Post Ombudsman Richard Harwood, who, it is rumored, serves as Executive Director of the Benevolent Protective Order of Coincidence Theorists, (\*91) recently issued a warning about presidential candidates "who have begun to mutter about a press conspiracy". Ordinarily, Harwood would simply dismiss these charges as "symptoms of the media paranoia that quadrennially engulfs members of the American political class" (\*92). But a fatal mistake was made by the mutterers; they used the "C" word against the PRESS! And Harwood exploded his off-the-cuff comment into an entire column ending it with: "We are the new journalists, immersed too long, perhaps, in the cleansing waters of political conformity. But conspirators we ain't".

Distinguished investigative journalist Morton Mintz, a 29-year veteran of the Washington Post, now chairs the Fund for Investigative Journalism. In the December issue of The Progressive, Mintz wrote "A Reporter Looks Back in Anger Why the Media Cover Up Corporate Crime". Therein he discussed the difficulties in convincing editors to accept important news stories. He illustrated the article with his own



experiences at the Post, where he says he was known as "the biggest pain in the ass in the office" (\*93).

Would Harwood argue that grief endured by journalists at the hands of editors is a matter of random coincidence?

And that such policy as Mintz described is made independently by editors without influence from fellow editors or from management? Would Harwood have us believe that at the countless office "meetings" in which news people are ever in attendance, there is no discussion of which stories will run and which ones will find inadequate space? That there is no advanced planning for stories or that there are no cooperative efforts among the staff? Or that in the face of our news-media "grayout" of presidential candidate Larry Agran, (\*94) a Post journalist would be free to give news space to candidate Agran equal to that the Post lavishes on candidate Clinton? Let's face it: these possibilities are about as likely as Barbara Bush entertaining guests at a soup kitchen.

Would Harwood have us believe that media critic and former Post Ombudsman Ben Bagdikian is telling less than the truth in his account of wire-service control over news: "The largely anonymous men who control the syndicate and wire service copy desks and the central wire photo machines determine at a single decision what millions will see and hear. ...there seems to be little doubt that these gatekeepers preside over an operation in which an appalling amount of press agency sneaks in the back door of American journalism and marches untouched out the front door as 'news'" (\*95).

When he sat on the U.S. District Court of Appeals in Washington, Judge Clarence Thomas violated U.S. law when he failed to remove himself from a case in which he then proceeded to reverse a \$10 million judgment against the Ralston Purina Company (\*96). Ralston Purina, the animal feed empire, is the family fortune of Thomas' mentor, Senator John Danforth. The Post limited its coverage of the Thomas malfeasance to 56 words buried in the middle of a 1200-word article (\*97). Would Harwood have us believe that the almost complete blackout on this matter by the major news media and the U.S. Senate was a matter of coincidence? Could a Post reporter have written a story about Ralston Purina if she had wanted to? Can a brick swim?

Or take the fine report produced last September by Ralph Nader's Public Citizen. Titled All the Vice President's Men, it documents "How the Quayle Council on Competitiveness Secretly Undermines Health, Safety, and Environmental Programs". Three months later, Post journalists David Broder and Bob Woodward published "The President's Understudy", a seven-part series on Vice President Quayle. Although this series does address Quayle's role with the Competitiveness Council, its handling of the Council's disastrous impact on America is inadequate. It is 40,000 words of mostly aimless chatter about Quayle memorabilia: youth, family, college record, Christianity, political aspirations, intellectual aspirations, wealthy friends, government associates, golf, travels, wife Marilyn, and net worth revealing little about Quayle's abilities, his understanding of society's problems, or his thoughts about justice and freedom, and never mentioning the comprehensive Nader study of Quayle's record in the Bush Administration (\*98).

Now, did Broder or did Woodward forget about the Nader study? Or did both of them forget? Or did one, or the other, or both decide not to mention it? Did these two celebrated, seasoned Post reporters ever discuss together their jointly authored stories? Did they decide to publish such a barren set of articles because it would enhance their reputations? How did management feel about the use of precious news space for such frivolity? Is it possible that so many pages were dedicated to this twaddle without people "acting or working together toward the same result or goal"? (\*99) Do crocodiles fly?

On March 20, front-page headlines in the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, USA Today, and the Washington Post read respectively:

## TSONGAS DROPPED OUT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE CLEARING CLINTON'S PATH

## TSONGAS ABANDONS CAMPAIGN LEAVING CLINTON CLEAR PATH TOWARD SHOWDOWN WITH BUSH

## TSONGAS CLEARS WAY FOR CLINTON

## TSONGAS EXIT CLEARS WAY FOR CLINTON

This display of editorial independence should at least raise questions of whether the news media collective mindset is really different from that of any other cartel like oil, diamond, energy, (\*100) or manufacturing cartels, a cartel being "a combination of independent commercial enterprises designed to limit competition" (\*101).

The Washington Post editorial page carries the heading:

### AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

Is it? Of course not. There probably is no such thing. Does the Post "conspire" to keep its staff and its newspaper from wandering too far from the safety of mediocrity? The Post would respond that the question is absurd. In that I am not privy to the Post's telephone conversations, I can only speculate on how closely the media elite must monitor the staff. But we all know how few micro-seconds it takes a new reporter to learn what subjects are taboo and what are "safe", and that experienced reporters don't have to ask.

What is more important, however, than speculating about how the Post communicates within its own corporate structure and with other members of the cartel, is to document and publicize what the Post does in public, namely, how it shapes and censors the news.

Sincerely,

Julian C. Holmes

Copies to: Public-spirited citizens, both inside and outside the news media, And - maybe a few others. \_

Notes to Letter of April 25, 1992:

1. Mark Hosenball, "The Ultimate Conspiracy", Washington Post, September 11, 1988, p.C1
- 2a. Julian Holmes, Letter to Washington Post Ombudsman Richard Harwood, June 4, 1991. Notes that the Post censored, from the Anderson/Van Atta column, references to the Christie Institute and to Robert Gates.
- 2b. Jack Anderson and Dale Van Atta, "Iran-Contra Figure Dodges Extradition", Washington Merry-Go-Round, United Feature Syndicate, May 26, 1991. This is the column submitted to the Post (see note 2a)..
- 2c. Jack Anderson and Dale Van Atta, "The Man Washington Doesn't Want to Extradite", Washington Post, May 26, 1991. The column (see note 2b). as it appeared in the Post (see note 2a)..
- 3a. Case No. 86-1146-CIV-KING, Amended Complaint for RICO Conspiracy, etc., United States District Court, Southern District of Florida, Tony Avirgan and Martha Honey v. John Hull et al., October 3, 1986.
- 3b. Vince Bielski and Dennis Bernstein, "Reports: Contras Send Drugs to U.S.", Cleveland Plain Dealer,

November 16, 1986.

3c. Neal Matthews, "I Ran Drugs for Uncle Sam" (based on interviews with Robert Plumlee, contra resupply pilot)., San Diego Reader, April 5, 1990.

4. Leslie Cockburn, Out of Control. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1987.

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5b. David S. Hilzenrath, "Hill Panel Finds No Evidence Linking Contras to Drug Smuggling", Washington Post, July 22, 1987, p.A07.

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